



Office of Management's Monthly Newsletter

The Beacon

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service
Office of Management
Ronald Hicks, Deputy Administrator

December 1999
Volume 3, Number 7
web: www.fsis.usda.gov/om/adserv.htm
e-mail: fsis.servicebeacon@usda.gov

bea-con (bê' ken) *noun*

A signaling or guiding device, such as a lighthouse, located on a coast. A source of guidance or inspiration.

Happy Holidays

by Ron Hicks
Deputy Administrator
Office of Management
Telephone: 202-720-4425

As we close the 20th century and enter a new millenium, the Federal Government will be officially celebrating Christmas and New Year's Day. During this period, celebrated by all of the various religious and cultural groups, I truly wish each and every one of you a safe and happy holiday season and hope you enjoy a prosperous 2000.

National Performance Review Customer Satisfaction Survey

In January 1999, Vice President Gore, through the National Performance Review (NPR), announced the intent to conduct a national assessment of customer satisfaction to gauge how well the government performs. High Impact Agencies, including FSIS, were asked to participate in this customer satisfaction survey. In June and July, FSIS agency representatives met with NPR, Arthur Anderson, and the University of Michigan and identified three activities that have a connection to the general public. The areas selected were:

- Labeling information giving nutritional and safety information about meat and poultry;

- FSIS mission measures such as awareness of the mark of inspection and ensuring safety; and
- The timeliness and adequacy of FSIS recall of meat and poultry products.

You may be hearing more information about this survey in the coming weeks. The Agency will be releasing the results of the survey as soon as possible. As always, improving customer satisfaction will be an ongoing endeavor for FSIS.

If you have any questions about the NPR survey, contact Sheila Johnson of the Planning Staff on 202-501-7138.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

Financial Processing Center Mailing Tips

by Bruce Townsend
Financial Management Division
Telephone: 515-334-2025

When you send your T&A, Form 5110-1, slaughter documents, requests for reimbursement, or any other document to the Financial Processing Center (FPC), you join approximately 10,000 other employees who trust us to process their documents as quickly as possible. There are a few things you can do when preparing your documents for mailing that can help us.

Please do not use staples or paperclips except in special circumstances

We sort everything by document type. Your T&A's and 5110-1's are not processed by the same Financial Technician, so we are actually slowed down if you try to keep these documents together. If you are combining documents for a number of employees, it is better if the T&A's and 5110-1's are separated. Only use staples on Travel Vouchers, requests for reimbursement, or in other circumstances where there is supporting documentation. We use automated date-stamping machines that do not like staples, and we spend a lot of time removing staples and separating documents.

Use the right envelope, available from the Landover Service Center

Please use either the 9x12 Blue Business Reply envelope, FSIS Form 1400-89, the 9x12 manila Business Reply envelope, FSIS Form 1413-50, or the smaller 4x9

In This Issue...

Travel – Page 2
Workforce of the Future –
Page 3
VDIP – Page 4
Supplies – Page 5
Safety and Health – Page 5
Issuances – Page 6
Human Resources – Page 6
Vehicles – Page 8

white letter-size envelope, FSIS Form 5610-1. The large envelopes should be used for T&A's and 5110-1's, so they don't have to be folded. The large envelopes also do not require any postage. All of these envelopes are addressed to the FPC at P. O. Box 9205, Des Moines, IA. We go to the Des Moines Post Office every morning at 6:30 am to pick up this mail so we can process it early in the day. You can combine any mail to the FPC in a single envelope.

If you are authorized to use Federal Express, get your airbills from Landover.

Don't order airbills from your FedEx Driver using the national account number. If you do, the airbills are printed with the FPC as the return address, and the airbills are sent here – you won't get them. Order the airbills from Landover to assure you get the right thing and that your documents get here. The item number is FSIS-59. If you address a blank airbill, be sure to use our street address, 4520 114th Street, Urbandale, IA 50322-5410. FedEx can't deliver to a P. O. Box. Please don't check special services on the FedEx airbill, like "First Overnight" or "Saturday Delivery". Neither of these will result in your package reaching us any sooner, but they will increase the cost to the Agency. A Federal Express mailer marked for Saturday Delivery costs \$25 to \$30 because it is outside the contract between FSIS and FedEx! The FPC is not open on Saturday, and your package will either be left outside our door over the weekend, or will be returned to the sorting point and will likely be delayed.

Please do not put documents in another envelope inside the FedEx mailer. This is unnecessary, and doubles the time it takes to open it. Also, if you use the U. S. Postal Service Express Mail for faster delivery, the cost is \$11.75 for a single T&A. We have a contract

with Federal Express for much less cost. You should contact your District Office if you need approval to use FedEx.

Destroy obsolete envelopes.

Some of you complete the LS-149, which is mailed to the Iowa Agricultural Statistics Office at 210 Walnut Street, Room 833, Des Moines, Iowa. These envelopes are supplied directly to you by the Iowa Ag Statistics, and they are correct. If you have any old envelopes addressed to the FSIS Data Services in Room 791 at 210 Walnut Street, throw them away. The Data Services unit came to the FPC in 1997, and anything sent to their old address will go to a dead letter department in the Post Office. You should destroy any old envelope with the eagle indicia where a stamp would go, and you should not change the address on any old Business Reply envelopes addressed to the former regional offices.

Other Tips

Don't send your SF-71, Request for Leave to the FPC. You or your supervisor should keep these. We do not return them.

Don't send applications for export to the FPC. These should be kept at the establishment. Again, we do not return these forms.

We receive a lot of forms that should go to the Human Resources Field Office in Minneapolis. These include W-4's for tax withholding, Savings Bond Elections, Direct Deposit forms, life insurance and health insurance forms, etc. We cheerfully forward these forms to Minneapolis, but they are delayed a couple of days if you mail them to us.

We are constantly striving to improve our processes at the FPC to serve you better. The mail

sorting procedure is extremely important to our commitment to quickly and accurately process the thousands of documents we receive each pay period. If you send your documents using the above information, you will be helping us serve you better.

If you have questions, call me at 515-334-2025, send a fax to 515-334-2057, or send an e-mail on Outlook or to bruce.townsend@dchqexs1.hqnet.usda.gov.

TRAVEL

New Per Diem Rates

by Barbara McNiff

Budget Division

Telephone: 202-720-3061

GSA will issue new per diem rates for calendar year 2000. Among the cities that have been subjected to an extra layer of review in 1999, are Omaha, NE; Lincoln, NE; Chicago, IL; Miami, FL; Springfield, MO; Jacksonville, FL and St. Louis, MO. The rates are expected to be published in December and we will make every effort to disseminate these rates as quickly as possible, including through the revision of FSIS Directive 3800.1.

Mileage Rates for Privately-Owned Vehicles

Contrary to what some employees believe, the mileage reimbursement rates contained in the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR's) are not tied to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) rates for use in computing the deductible cost paid when operating an automobile for business. A recently revised law held that the rate contained in the FTR's may not exceed the IRS rate. Therefore, last April when the IRS lowered the reimbursement rate from 32.5 cents/mile to 31 cents/mile, by law, the FTR's had to be lowered. However, it does not necessarily

follow that if the IRS raises the reimbursement, the FTR rate will also be raised.

For calendar year 2000, the IRS has raised the mileage rate to 32.5 cents/mile. The General Services Administration expects to set the new FTR rate by January 1, 2000. We will pass this information on to you as soon as we can.

New Travel Management Contracts

There will be major changes in the new contracts between GSA and the Travel Management Center (TMC's) – the program that handles procurement of travel services including airline transportation, hotel accommodations, etc. Among the changes will be fees for services. Also, GSA will issue master contracts to all companies that place successful bids for the right to provide services to agencies in a particular geographic location. Agencies must then select a company from those with master contracts. The responsible individuals in field offices should contact the appropriate regional GSA office, if they have not already done so, for information on the new contracts. If you would like to see which travel agencies in your geographic area have been issued master contracts, you can view it on the web at:

<http://www.region9.gsa.gov/fss/procurement/tmc/awardsfp.htm>.

Proposed Exceptions to Mandatory Use and Issuance of the Government Charge Card for Travel

by Sue Ayers
Budget Division
Telephone: 202-720-5068

The Travel and Transportation Reform Act (Public Law 105-264) requires that the General Services Administration (GSA) establish rules for use of the Government-issued

travel charge card. Therefore, on July 16, GSA issued an Interim Rule that will require *mandatory use* and *mandatory issuance* of the charge card for all official travel performed after December 31.

The Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) of USDA has submitted some proposed exceptions to GSA regarding (1) who must be issued a travel charge card and (2) which expenses will be exempt from being charged to the travel card. Among their proposals, OCFO has asked that exemptions be given to new employees who may be required to perform temporary duty travel enroute to their first post of duty and to employees who have issues concerning credit.

As soon as OCFO issues the Department's regulations that identify all exceptions to the Public Rule, the Agency will provide notice to all employees.

WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

Agency Freezes Consumer Safety Officer Initiative

by Yvonne Davis, Chair
Telephone: 202-720-5632

In early December, FSIS began notifying the 49 qualified applicants of the cancellation of the announcements for 30 Consumer Safety Officer (GS-696) positions in six metropolitan locations. The Career Enhancement positions were advertised last summer and generated many applications from current employees. Unfortunately, the announcements must now be canceled.

FSIS canceled the announcements based on congressional guidance in the FY 2000 appropriation bill. Congress expressed concerns about minimizing relocation costs, among other issues. The specific language

from the conference report follows:

"The agreement does not provide funds requested for Consumer Safety Officers [\$10.8 million]. The conferees are concerned about the substantial funding increase required to convert and relocate current employees to these upgraded positions [Consumer Safety Officer positions]. The conferees expect the agency to evaluate its staffing needs and to determine if relocation costs can be avoided by utilizing qualified local personnel and if these positions may be established in a more cost effective manner, and to report its findings to the Committees on Appropriations of the House and Senate no later than February 15, 2000."

Congress did provide \$8 million more than requested by the President for filling inspection vacancies and provided \$3 million, the amount requested, for hiring new inspectors. Congress also asked for more information on staffing and recruitment. The conference report language follows:

"Of the amount provided, no less than \$544,902,000 is reserved for Federal food inspection. Included in this amount is \$8,000,000 above the budget request for filling inspector vacancies and recruiting new inspectors, and \$3,007,000, the same amount requested in the budget for hiring new inspectors. The conferees note that despite being provided with its full request for fiscal year 1999, the agency has failed to devote sufficient funds for inspection activities. This has led to inspector shortages in certain parts of the country, creating an unnecessary hardship for the affected plants.

"The conferees expect the agency to provide the Committees on Appropriations of the House and Senate with an analysis of its staffing needs and recruitment

program no later than February 15, 2000. If third party consultants are necessary in order to fully evaluate recruitment, the agency should utilize such services. The conferees expect the agency to provide quarterly updates on budget execution, staffing levels and staffing needs in an effort to avoid future inspector shortages."

Agency executives are now studying the directions and guidance from Congress and seeking a course of action that is responsive to Congress while allowing FSIS to continue to strengthen our food safety and consumer protection program.

Questions about the Workforce of the Future can be directed to: Workforce of the Future (on Outlook); or to one of the following members of the steering committee: John Esgar (in the Minneapolis HRFO) at 800-370-3747, Joanne Bolton, Sharin Sachs, or Yvonne Davis in Washington, DC, at 202-720-5362.

VDIP

VDIP Methodology

by Kathy Welsh

Telephone: 202-720-5657

Milo Christianson

Telephone: 612-370-2000

Labor and Employee Relations
Division

Approximately 18 months ago, the Agency implemented the Voluntary Dispute Intervention Program (VDIP), a program designed to help employees resolve disputes through the use of a third party intervenor. Every day, however, employees resolve disputes, great and small, without the use of a third party. How do they do it? There is, of course, no single, easy answer to this question. One thing that they most likely do, however, is listen to each other. The key to resolving disputes, with or without the help of

a third party, is effective listening. During a mediation, one of the mediator's major tasks is to make certain that the parties listen to each other. When a mediator is not present, it is up to the disputants to make certain that this happens.

To listen effectively, a listener must be actively involved in the conversation, not just passively absorbing information like a giant sponge. Listening is more than just hearing. It is an active process in which both speaker and listener are engaged. The following are a few things that you can do, as a listener, to be actively involved in a conversation:

1. *Show Some Interest.* At a minimum, you need to show some interest in the conversation. Occasional eye contact helps. Certain minimal responses such as "yes," "I see," and so on are also ways to show that you are listening.
2. *Ask Questions.* By asking questions, you again show that you are engaged in the conversation. Questions can also be used to gain additional information, or to clarify information that you have already been given. The important thing to remember when asking questions, or when using any of the techniques described below, is to refrain from overuse. Overuse can be disruptive because it interrupts the speaker's efforts to transmit a message. Therefore, anytime you use questions or any other active listening techniques, make certain that the interruption has a purpose that will facilitate rather than needlessly disrupt the conversation.
3. *Probe.* This technique is similar in intent to asking questions. The goal is to get

more information. To probe for more information, you might say "Tell me more about that," or "I'd like to spend more time in this area."

4. *Paraphrase.* Paraphrasing is repeating what someone else has said in different and generally fewer words. The purpose is to check with the speaker to make certain that you are understanding the message correctly. You might say, "I understood you to say that.... Is this correct?"
5. *Interpret.* We interpret when we add something to what the speaker is saying. For example, a speaker may say, "With all that I've learned so far, I'm not sure that I can handle the job." Your interpreting response may be, "You're wondering if you made the right career choice."
6. *Provide Feedback.* We sometimes need to give the speaker honest feedback about how we are reacting to what is being said. This technique focuses on the feelings and opinions of the listener. For example, you may provide feedback to the speaker by saying, "I think you're wrong about yourself." Or you may say, "What you are saying makes me feel that you do not like me."
7. *Inform.* Informing is merely providing factual information to the speaker. It is objective and is given without the impression of advising.
8. *Summarize.* Briefly restate what has been discussed up to a point in the conversation. This can be done at any time, but should always be done at the end of a discussion.

These are some of the techniques that you, the listener, can use to remain actively involved in a conversation. Remember that *active listening is the key to dispute resolution*. It is something that most of us do not do naturally, but it is something that can be learned with practice.

Not all disputes can be resolved without the intervention of a third party. If you would like help in resolving a dispute that you have been unable to resolve personally, please contact the VDIP by calling 1-800-860-VDIP (8347) or by calling 612-370-2010, ext. 2539 in Minneapolis or 202-205-0066 in Washington.

SUPPLIES

New Supply Items

by Pete Bridgeman

Administrative Services Division

Telephone: 301-504-4222

The new items mentioned in the October and November issues of *The Beacon* are now in stock at Landover. Below is a listing of the New Items with their Item Numbers for ordering, and the Units of Issue for each:

FSIS-64, Mechanical Wax Pencil, DZ (Dozen)
 FSIS-65, Plastic Postage Stamp Dispenser, EA
 FSIS-66, Hog Rings, BX (Box of 100)
 FSIS-67-SM, Freezer Jacket – Small, EA
 FSIS-67-MD, Freezer Jacket -- Medium, EA
 FSIS-67-LG, Freezer Jacket – Large, EA
 FSIS-67-XL, Freezer Jacket -- Extra Large, EA
 FSIS-67-2XL, Freezer Jacket -- Double Extra Large, EA
 FSIS-67-3XL, Freezer Jacket -- Triple Extra Large, EA

Unit of Issue Changes

The unit of issue has changed for AA and AAA batteries. The unit of issue is now BX4 (Box of 4) for these batteries. The Item Numbers will remain the same (892 = AA Batteries, 6084 = AAA Batteries).

Supply Orders Backed Up

The consolidation of the Supply system with the Forms and Specialty Items system that we talked about in the November issue of *The Beacon* has caused a temporary slowdown on the processing of the supply items on orders. In the process of changing over to a Bar Code system, some unforeseen problems occurred, and this resulted in Landover not being able to fill Supply Orders while they fixed the problems. During the months of October and November, orders for supply items took a lot longer to get filled than normal. This should improve this month as they work all of the bugs out of the new system, and you should hopefully begin to see normal turn-around times for supply items again by next month. We apologize for any delays in receiving supplies that you've had to endure. It is only a temporary problem, which should result in long range improvements in how you order supplies. We thank you for your patience.

First Aid Kits

At the semi-annual Environmental Health and Safety Branch (EHSB) meeting held in Beltsville, MD, during the week of November 15th, we spoke to the Field Safety and Occupational Health Specialists about the composition of the First Aid Kits that we provide out of Landover. We are going to begin the process of looking at the contents of these kits to determine whether they meet the needs of our field personnel, and what we can do to improve what is provided in them. Part of this process will most likely

include a field survey. You are, however, welcome to provide us with your input and ideas at any time, regarding what you would like to see included in the First Aid Kits. You may submit your ideas to Betsy Kogan of EHSB, using whichever form of communication is most convenient for you, e-mail, fax, or regular mail.

E-mail: elizabeth.kogan@usda.gov

Fax: 301-504-4275

Mail:

USDA, FSIS, EHSB

Maildrop 5250

5601 Sunnyside Ave

Beltsville, MD 20705-5250

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH

December is National Drunk and Drugged Driving Prevention Month

by Betsy Kogan

Administrative Services Division

Telephone: 301-504-4250

Statistics have just been released by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) which reveals an increase in fatal, alcohol related car crashes for the first time in a decade. Of the 41,798 traffic deaths in 1995, 41.3% were driving while impaired by drugs or alcohol. One person died every 30 minutes and one was injured every 2, due to alcohol related motor vehicle crashes in 1995. And although this represented a 24% decrease from 1985, it was the first time in 10 years that the body count rose instead of fell.

President Clinton has proclaimed December Drunk and Drugged Driving Prevention Month. He believes with a national commitment, we will be successful in ridding our highways of drunk drivers. He's urging all American to observe a special day of remembrance for victims of drunk and drugged driving. Participate in

"National Lights on for Life Day Friday, December 20th, by driving with your headlights on. It's such a simple act, but one that bands people together, fighting for a common good as well as showing support for the loved ones having to deal with the loss left by a drunk driver.

Approximately 25 percent of the FSIS inspection workforce spend an average of two hours per day on official business in cars. Let's share in President Clinton's proclamation and drive defensively in case you are confronted with an impaired driver.

Safety Poster Calendar

by Roger Perkerewicz
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 303-497-5411, x-247

The Multi-District Safety and Occupational Health Committee for the Districts of Alameda, Boulder, Minneapolis and Salem recently held a Safety and Health Poster contest. The winning posters, three from each district, will be displayed in a safety calendar for year 2000. The winners are as follows:

Alameda - Linda Uriarte, John Nichols, Patricia Gay

Boulder - Phillip Atencio, James McGovern, Javier Macias

Minneapolis - Margaret Knisley, Ranate Schaefer, William Miller

Salem - Paul Sherman, Ben Jeffords, Robert Holloway

The distribution for the calendars will be to all employees in the four districts. Congratulations to the winners and thanks to everyone for participating in helping make safety a priority in the new millenium.

ISSUANCES

Recent Agency Issuances

By Mary Wissman
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 301-504-4233

The following notices have been issued since the November 1999 edition of *The Beacon*. Many recent issuances are available in an electronic format from the "PCDIALS" library in Opendedsk and from the "Agency Issuances" public folder in the Exchange mail system (Outlook).

Notice 33-99 (11/1/99)
Restoration of Forfeited Annual Leave

Notice 34-99 (11/1/99)
Special Provisions for the End of the Leave Year

Notice 35-99 (11/1/99)
Federal Holidays in 2000

Notice 36-99 (11/1/99)
Employee Length-of-Service Recognition
July 1999 Through September 1999

Notice 37-99 (11/1/99)
Usage of Electronic Tickets

Notice 38-99 (11/3/99)
Official Mail System Reminder

Notice 39-99 (11/3/99)
Federal Employees Health Benefits (FEHB) Open Season
November 8 Through December 13, 1999

Notice 40-99 (11/12/99)
Labor-Management Relations

Directives and notices are distributed automatically to applicable Agency employees and offices. Additional copies are available from:

USDA FSIS ASD P&DS
MAILDROP 5241

5601 SUNNYSIDE AVENUE
BELTSVILLE MD 20705-5241

Tel: 301-504-4242
Fax: 301-504-4277

HUMAN RESOURCES

Applying for GS-1862 Consumer Safety Inspector Positions

Many employees have asked the question "How do I apply for GS-1862 Consumer Safety Inspector positions?" In the future this series will most likely be in the recurring system, but presently all Consumer Safety Inspector positions are being advertised through individual vacancy announcements. Any employee wanting to be considered should apply directly to the vacancy announcement by filling out an application, addressing the job elements, and submitting a current performance appraisal to the Human Resource Field Office in Minneapolis.

Any interested employees who are noncompetitive eligible (have permanently held a grade equal to or higher than the position announced) may be considered under the provisions of Transition MOU #3, Voluntary Reassignment System for Food Inspectors. Noncompetitive applicants must submit FSIS Form 4335-3, Employee Request for Reassignment Within Field Operations, in accordance with the provisions of the MOU to receive consideration.

Completing Applications

by Employment Section
Human Resources Division
Telephone: 612-370-2000

When applying for another FSIS job, you must submit a complete application, which includes a thorough response to all job elements in order to assure that you are considered for a vacant position.

The application is often your only chance to demonstrate that you are the best qualified candidate, so it should be carefully completed and thoroughly reviewed. Selecting officials must justify their decisions. If you write a good application, you make it easier for the supervisor or manager to select you.

Also, please remember that it is the employee's responsibility to submit a performance appraisal with applications for vacancy announcements. Your performance appraisal must be dated within the last 15 months to be considered current. If circumstances beyond your control keep you from attaching a copy of a current appraisal, please call or write the servicing personnel office (the Human Resources Field Office for field employees on 1-800-370-3747 or the Employment Services and Policy Branch on 202-720-6617 for headquarters' employees) before the announcement closes. Exceptions to the normal requirements may sometimes be granted under extenuating circumstances.

Giving Advice To Uncle Sam --- The New Exit Interview Form

Dear Abby makes a living by giving advice to others. While not many of us can make a living dispensing advice, most people like to have a chance to share their views. The Department's new Exit Interview Questionnaire gives departing employees that chance to share their thoughts about working in FSIS. Feedback from employees who are leaving the Agency can help shape policies and procedures. In the end, knowing why someone left the Agency may lead to improvements in the workplace and greater employee retention.

Forms are distributed through channels to supervisors on a regular basis. When employees indicate that they will be leaving the Agency, supervisors are asked to provide an

Exit Interview Questionnaire and a pre-addressed, postage-paid envelope. Completion of the form is voluntary and strictly confidential. Additional forms can be obtained by field employees through the mail or through the Fax on Demand system in the Minneapolis office. The Fax on Demand telephone number is 612-370-2002. The general number for the Minneapolis Human Resources Field Office is 800-370-3747. Headquarters employees can obtain the forms from the Washington servicing office (Employment Services and Policy Branch on 202-720-6617).

Changing Federal Income Tax Withholding

*by Pay and Leave Section
Human Resources Division
Telephone: 612-370-2000*

Am I having too much federal income tax withheld, or not enough? If you want to make a change, you only need to complete a Form W-4, Employee's Withholding Allowance Certificate. Once the form is complete, mail it directly to your Servicing Personnel Office, the HRFO in Minneapolis, Minnesota, (field employees) or Employment Services and Policy Branch in Washington, DC (headquarters employees). Don't wait until April 15 before you make a change. Changes can be made at anytime.

The Work Number for Everyone®

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has made an automated employment verification system available, The Work Number for Everyone®. Effective immediately, you will be able to use this service whenever you need to provide employment verification to secure a loan or rent an apartment.

The Work Number for Everyone® will benefit you because it is -

- *Timely* - The information is available to the lender in a matter of minutes.
- *Easy to Use* - Automated, one call, paperless.
- *Accurate* - Information is taken directly from the USDA Payroll/Personnel system record and updated biweekly.
- *Accessible* - Available 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. TDD access is provided through the Federal Information Relay Service at 1-800-877-8339.
- *Trackable* - A record of all requests is maintained.
- *Simple* - One number nationwide.

The Work Number for Everyone® has security features which ensure that information will be released only to those who have proper authorization. Access is controlled using a Personal Identification Number (PIN). *For the Department of Agriculture (USDA) employees, your PIN is the four-digit number signifying your month and day of birth (e.g., if your birthday is September 24, your PIN is 0924).* The use of this PIN, combined with your social security number and the USDA Employer Code, 10284, gives you control over who can obtain your employment and salary information.

If you have any questions or would like a brochure on this service, please contact your appropriate Human Resources Division office. Field employees contact the Human Resources Field Office at 1-800-370-3747. For headquarters employees, contact the Employment Services and Policy Branch at 202-720-6617.

October/November Retirements

Ernest K. Albrecht, FI, OFO, New York, NY, 10/30/99, 19 Years
Noel O. Anderson, Consmr Safety Inspr, OFO, Chicago, IL, 10/29/99, 32 Years

James A. Finke, Consmr Safety
Inspr, OFO, Cincinnati, OH,
10/30/99, 13 Years
Eugene A. Larovere, Consmr Safety
Inspr, OFO, Bensalem, PA,
11/06/99, 12 Years
Richard R. Lefeber, FI, OFO,
Denison, IA, 09/25/99, 5 Years
Carol A. Leonard, Safety and Occ
Hlth Spec, OM, Urbandale, IA,
11/03/99, 34 Years
James M. Lynn, Sr., FI, OFO,
Stillmore, GA, 10/30/99, 30 Years
James R. McCabe, FI, OFO, Green
Top, MO, 10/29/99, 15 Years
Hubert I. H. Mincey, FI, OFO,
Canton, GA, 10/23/99, 30 Years
Freda M. Pierce, FI, OFO, Danville,
AR, 10/29/99, 20 Years
Robert C. Sheard, Jr., VMO, OFO,
Bidwell, OH, 10/22/99, 25 Years
Timothy A. Slaughter, FI, OFO,
West Point, NE, 10/23/99, 27 Years
William I. Still, Jr., Computer Asst.,
Dallas, TX, 11/06/99, 18 Years
Louis D. Streble, FI, OFO, Green
Bay, WI, 10/23/99, 23 Years

Leave Transfer Recipients

1. Martha Stamps
OFO, AR; Serious Illness
2. Jackie Copeland
OFO, DC; Illness
3. Annie Stewart
OM, MN; Serious Illness
4. Kasturi Basu
OFO, DC; Surgery
5. Linda Cole
OPPDE, DC; Serious Illness
6. Sonya West
OPPDE, DC; Maternity
7. Joyce Schultz
POB, MN; Serious Illness
8. OFO-98-0031*
OFO, AR; Serious Illness
9. Stephanie Showell
OFO, DE; Family Illness
10. Michael Schwochert
OFO, CO; Surgery
11. Willia Stepney
OM, DC; Maternity
12. Michelle Carpenter
OFO, OH; Complications
w/pregnancy
13. Linda Carey
EMS, DC; Surgery

14. Nancy Clyburn
OPHS, DC; Surgery
15. OFO-99-0007*
OFO, SC; Serious Illness
16. George Olson
OFO, MN; Family Illness
17. Kellie Upshaw
EMS, DC; Maternity
18. Traci Edmond
EMS, DC; Maternity
19. Mary Sutton
OPHS, GA; Complications
w/pregnancy
20. Cheryl Evans
OFO, AR; Surgery
21. Marilyn Weber
FPC, IA; Illness
22. Robert Martz
OFO, IA; Serious Illness
23. Alma Lindsey
OFO, IL; Illness
24. Joseph Banales
OFO, CA; Illness
25. Lorraine Kauffman
OM, DC; Maternity
26. Charles Olson
OFO, WI; Serious Illness
27. Betty Morgan
OFO, AR; Family Illness
28. Carolyn Woolfolk
OFO, DC; Surgery
29. Donna Ogdahl
OFO, MN; Surgery
30. OFO-99-0027
OFO, NC, Surgery
31. Carol Leonard
OM, IA; serious Illness
32. Theresa Spoering
OFO, MN; Surgery
33. OFO-99-0033
OFO, TX
34. OFO-99-0034
OFO, SD; Family Illness
35. Karen Wratchford
OFO, KY; Surgery
36. Maureen Murphy
OFO, OK; Surgery
37. Tammy Love
OFO, AR; Surgery
38. Steve Engels
OFO, IA; Serious Illness
39. Sue Engels
OFO, IA; Family Illness
40. Michael Craig
OFO, NE; Family Illness
41. Nicole Wareham
OFO, IN; Maternity

42. Michelle Long
OM, DC; Surgery
43. Glenda Snyders
OFO, KS; Surgery
44. Angela Cuello
OFO, TX; Serious Illness
45. Mona Eder
OFO, IL; Maternity
46. Gary Palubicki
OFO, MN; Surgery
47. Aurbrey Tribble
OFO, FL; Serious Illness
48. Jacqueline Bonner
OFO, AL; Surgery

* While not consenting to the publication of their names, certain LTP recipients are assigned a number that they may provide to their co-workers if they choose so that donated leave may be transferred to their account. Any questions on the LTP should be referred to the Human Resources Field Office on 1-800-370-3747 for field employees and to the Classification and Compensation Branch for HQ employees on 202-720-6287.

Thrift Savings Plan Rates

Beginning this month, we will publish the most recent month Thrift Savings Plan (TSP) rates. Attachment 1 to this edition of *The Beacon* contains the rates through October 1999.

VEHICLES

Reporting Monthly Mileage of Government Vehicles

by Brian McNiff
Administrative Services Division
Telephone: 301-504-4221

(Note: This article appeared in the October 1998 issue of *The Beacon*. At an Labor Management meeting in the Albany District on November 16, 1999, a number of questions arose regarding the proper use of Code 17. We were asked to reprint this article, since it seemed to clear up a lot of confusion some other districts

were experiencing before it ran the first time.)

Transaction Code 17 - What Does It Mean?

We get a lot of questions from GSA Vehicle drivers regarding the proper use of Transaction Code 17. Does it have to be used every time I drive the government vehicle home and back to work? What purpose does it serve? Whose responsibility is it to ensure that it's being used properly? The intent of this article is to clarify the purpose of Code 17, when it should be used, who is responsible for properly reporting it, and what the authorities associated with it are.

What is it? The Tax Reform Act of 1984 required that certain employer-provided fringe benefits be considered as Income for Federal Tax purposes. The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) determined that employer-provided transportation (such as GSA Vehicles) between home and the point of duty is such a fringe benefit, and that for each one-way commute the sum of \$1.50 should be reported as taxable income. Transaction Code 17 was developed to capture

these fringe benefit trips on the Time and Attendance (T & A) form.

Departmental Regulation 2600-1, Taxation of Fringe Benefits, issued on 2/21/90, clarified what trips are considered fringe benefits, and thus require the use of Code 17. *When a Government Vehicle is used to travel between a residence and the official duty station, unless all miles on the trip would otherwise be reimbursable, Code 17 should be used.* Each one way trip should be reported, however, it is not required if a driver makes less than 1 round trip per month between home and work in the government vehicle, or less than 12 round trips per year.

As a rule of thumb, if an entire trip would be reimbursable if you were driving a Privately Owned Vehicle (POV), it does not require the use of Code 17 when driving a GSA car. If a trip would not be reimbursable in a POV, or would only be partially reimbursable, then Code 17 should be used with the GSA car. (See FSIS Directive 3800.2 to determine when a trip is reimbursable with a POV).

If used properly, Code 17 allow accurate tax information to be compiled for the W-2 Form, Annual Withholding Tax Statement. In the event of a tax audit, any trips involving the use of a government furnished vehicle between the residence and official duty station which are not claimed under Code 17 would be subject to scrutiny, and if not properly claimed as a fringe benefit, would result in a penalty and fine.

It is each individual's responsibility to provide the correct information for tax purposes. Code 17 was designed to simplify the process of claiming commuting fringe benefits.

To comment on this newsletter or to submit an article for publication, please contact:

Kevin Dressman
Editor, *The Beacon*
USDA, FSIS, OM
Mail Drop 5250
5601 Sunnyside Avenue
Beltsville, MD 20705-5250
Tel: 301-504-4247
Fax: 301-504-4275
kevin.dressman@usda.gov

The current and past editions of *The Beacon* are available electronically on the FSIS OpenDesk and Exchange mail systems as well as on the FSIS Website at: www.fsis.usda.gov/om/adserv.htm

ATTACHMENT 1

**C, F, and G Fund Monthly Returns
November 8, 1999**

Months	C Fund	Barclays Equity Index Fund	F Fund*	Barclays U.S. Debt Index Fund	G Fund
1989 (Jan-Dec)	31.03%	31.61%	13.89%	14.45%	8.81%
1990 (Jan-Dec)	(3.15)	(3.19)	8.00	8.89	8.90
1991 (Jan-Dec)	30.77	30.42	15.75	16.03	8.15
1992 (Jan-Dec)	7.70	7.61	7.20	7.37	7.23
1993 (Jan-Dec)	10.13	10.10	9.52	9.74	6.14
1994 (Jan-Dec)	1.33	1.32	(2.96)	(2.94)	7.22
1995 (Jan-Dec)	37.41	37.62	18.31	18.49	7.03
1996 (Jan-Dec)	22.85	22.98	3.66	3.73	6.76
1997 (Jan-Dec)	33.17	33.36	9.60	9.65	6.77
1998 (Jan-Dec)	28.44	28.58	8.70	8.69	5.74
1998					
November	6.04	6.06	0.56	0.57	0.42
December	5.76	5.76	0.30	0.30	0.43
1999					
January	4.19	4.18	0.71	0.71	0.42
February	(3.09)	(3.11)	(1.74)	(1.75)	0.38
March	3.99	4.00	0.54	0.55	0.47
April	3.86	3.87	0.29	0.32	0.46
May	(2.36)	(2.36)	(0.89)	(0.88)	0.47
June	5.54	5.55	(0.33)	(0.32)	0.49
July	(3.14)	(3.12)	(0.43)	(0.42)	0.52
August	(0.50)	(0.50)	(0.05)	(0.05)	0.53
September	(2.78)	(2.74)	1.15	1.16	0.51
October	6.34		0.38		0.53
Last 12 months	25.56		0.47		5.78

*Through 1990 the F Fund was invested in the Barclays Bond Index Fund.

The C Fund is invested in the Barclays Equity Index Fund, which tracks the S&P 500 stock index. The F Fund is invested in the Barclays U.S. Debt Index Fund, which tracks the Lehman Brothers Aggregate bond index. The G Fund is invested in special issues of U.S. Treasury securities.

The monthly C, F and G Fund returns represent net earnings for the month, after deduction of accrued administrative expenses. The C and F Fund returns also reflect the deduction of trading costs and accrued investment management fees.

The C, F and G Fund monthly returns are dollar-weighted: they reflect net earnings on the changing balances invested during the month. The C, F and G Fund returns for the last twelve months assume, except for the crediting of earnings, unchanging balances (time-weighting) from month to month and assume earnings are compounded on a monthly basis.

The C and F Fund returns vary from the Barclays returns because of C and F Fund expenses and changing balances in the C and F Funds. The Barclays returns are time-weighted: they assume constant dollar balances invested during each month and throughout the period. Future performance of the three funds will vary and may be significantly different from the returns shown above. See the "Summary of the Thrift Savings Plan" for detailed information about the funds and their investment risks.